



**Testimony of Victoria Veltri
State Healthcare Advocate
Before the Children's Committee
In Support of
Proposed Bills 169, 650 and 5567
February 14, 2013**

GOOD MORNING, SENATOR BARTOLOMEO, REPRESENTATIVE URBAN, SENATOR LINARES, REPRESENTATIVE BETTS AND MEMBERS OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate ("OHA"). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

I want to lend my strong support for Proposed Bills 169, 650 and 5567.

On October 17, 2012, OHA held a hearing on barriers to access for preventive and treatment services for behavioral health. The purpose of that hearing was to level set the current delivery system of mental health and substance use services in Connecticut. Behavioral health cases are OHA's number one type of clinical case, and they have been for some time. In 2012, OHA handled over 500 behavioral health cases.

OHA's hearing made it clear that we have a tremendous amount of work to do to address the problems in our system. Our findings, detailed in a report on our website, are based on our years of work and witness to the struggles of children, adults and families to access needed services. The report is available online at

http://www.ct.gov/oha/lib/oha/documents/publications/report_of_findings_and_recalls_on_oha_hearing_1-2-13.pdf.)

One of the logical steps that could be undertaken immediately is improved screening and intervention for children in school settings. In fact, both at our hearing and the legislative task force's mental health working group hearing, recommendations from providers, consumers and stakeholders focused on increased screening and interventions at schools and at school based health centers, which provide high quality mental health and substance use screening and treatment services. Proposed bill 169 simply reinforces this idea. OHA supports it, and requests that assessments include screening for substance use in addition to mental health.

Proposed bill 650 proposes another logical and common sense intervention of a hotline for parents to receive emotional support and education when their children are exhibiting behavioral health issues. Though we have available crises services for intervention such as emergency mobile psychiatric services, proposed bill 650 would provide parents the opportunity for coaching, education and intervention at all times, even when there is no crisis. This is a common sense proposal. In healthcare generally, we have similar resources available. A direct hotline for parents makes sense, and OHA lends its support for proposed bill 650.

Finally, successful systemic reform will take dedication, innovation and most importantly, time. OHA has convening authority under our statute to bring all stakeholders together on mental health issues, and the authority to facilitate public comment on state and federal laws and monitor implementation of those laws. OHA will exercise that authority within the next month or two, in partnership with the Office of the Child Advocate. OHA supports the concept of proposed bill 5567; it is consistent with OHA's mission and authority. We encourage the

committee to work in partnership with OHA and OCA in developing proposals for longer-term study and reforms. We welcome the committee's input into OHA's longer-term convening with the OCA.

Finally, I want to thank the committee for its commitment to increasing access to behavioral health services. We need to keep the dialog going. The more we talk about mental illness and issues of substance use—they often occur together—the better chance we have of raising awareness and decreasing stigma.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHA's testimony today. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at victoria.veltri@ct.gov.